

A Prodigal Son Turns Preacher

Liberty University News



The eldest son in a solid Christian family from Dayton, Ohio, Bill Keller gave his life to the Lord at the age of 12. ♦My goal was to attend seminary and become a pastor,♦ he remembers. ♦My dad died when I was 16. His legacy to me was a solid work ethic, so I did my best to put away money for college.♦ Bill worked and saved enough to get through three years at Ohio State, then took a year off to work full-time.

It was 1978 ♦ the beginning of the personal computer boom ♦ and young Keller realized he had a penchant for sales. In fact, he made so much money hawking computers, he abandoned thoughts of going back to school. His seminary dream fading into the distance, he heard another call. ♦My new god was money,♦ says Bill.

Keller went on to build a small financial empire with several businesses. Life was good, or so it seemed. Just before Easter of 1985, his pastor asked him to give a testimony, along with several others, in a mid-week service. As the time to speak came closer, Bill realized he couldn♦ do it. ♦I wasn♦ in any way what Christ had called me to be,♦ he says. ♦When the pastor closed the service, I hit the doors as fast as I could. I soon fell under deep conviction and wrestled with selling off my businesses, but like the rich young ruler wanting to follow Jesus, I went away sorrowful when the time came for me to make the decision,♦ Bill recalls. ♦Worldly greed held me like a vise.♦

It would take the ever-tightening grip of God♦s hand on his life for Bill to begin letting go of his lust for success and the lifestyle of the wealthy. Caught in a spiraling addiction to the rush of high-stakes day trading, his appetite only increased. Eventually his unbridled greed would lead him to insider trading deals and frequent trips to the Cayman Islands to hide his illegal earnings in offshore bank accounts. His scam turned out to be short-lived, however.

It wasn♦ long before the government caught scent of Bill♦s too-obvious trail. In January 1989, a messenger arrived at his Chicago office with an envelope from the SEC. He was under investigation. Stubborn and defiant, he and his attorneys fought the government tooth and nail for months. His fate was written by the hand of God, however. Exhausted, depressed and out of options, he eventually was indicted and sent to Chicago♦s Metropolitan Correctional Facility to await his trial.

As he lay awake one night in a solitary confinement cell, mistakenly punished for being near a prison altercation he♦d had no part of, Keller began to break. ♦God couldn♦ have brought me any lower,♦ he says. ♦I finally realized that I had been living a horrible lie. I thought of my wife Nan, who had stood by me even though I hadn♦ deserved it. Surely God♦s unconditional love was far greater. I finally was ready to come home to Him.♦





Mercifully offered a plea deal that would reduce his time in prison, Bill served out the remainder of his 42-month sentence in a minimum-security prison camp near Pensacola, Fla. where Nan was staying. ♦ I can honestly say those 30 months were the most precious of my life, ♦ he vows. Bill read his tear-stained Bible from cover to cover, and then began reading it again.

Applying to school after school so that he could finally complete his college studies and fulfill the call that God had given him in his earlier years, Bill faced one rejection after another as a convicted felon. Then came the one exception, Liberty University. While incarcerated, he eventually earned a B.S. in General Studies with concentrations in Biblical Studies and Journalism, through the Distance Learning Program at LU. ♦ I ♦ I will never be able to express the deep gratitude in my heart for Jerry Falwell and a school that believed in me, ♦ Bill says.

After his release from prison, God opened the door for Bill to work at

Christian station WCFC-TV in Chicago. He later became an ordained, traveling evangelist. Something was still missing for him, however. He wanted to reach the people who didn't attend church or watch Christian television. So in 1999 came the big thinker's biggest undertaking ♦ LivePrayer.com. Through a 24/7 live Internet stream, Bill and his volunteer staff provide round-the-clock encouragement and help to millions of hurting people they would otherwise not reach. ♦ We answer as many as 40,000 e-mails a day and have the privilege of leading many people Christ, ♦ says the ex-con turned Internet-age preacher. His daily e-mail devotional, written continuously since August 1999, goes to nearly 2 million subscribers.



In March 2003, Bill stepped out on faith and began broadcasting a live, late-night television show, ♦ Live Prayer with Bill Keller, ♦ Monday through Friday on UPN affiliate station WTOG in Tampa, Fla. The program has become number one in its 1 a.m. time slot ♦ a time when people are most vulnerable and receptive to the message of hope.

♦ God definitely had plans for my life, ♦ says a reflective Bill Keller, ♦ and Liberty University, through its excellent Distance Learning Program, was a big part of that process. ♦

"LivePrayer with Bill Keller" can be seen nationally on i-network (formally PAX TV) beginning July 3rd.